**Public Opinion in Political Science Workshop**

“Every PS 101 student should know what a political scientist actually does.”

**PART I:** Hand out cover sheet (this page, 1 copy to each student); 50 students means 50 copies; Every student takes ONE article summary paper (see below). There are 9 summaries, so for 50 students make 6 copies of the assignment below.

**10 Minutes: Reading / Critical Thinking**

Write down your answers to the questions below (after reading 1 page summary).

***Article summaries are often actual excerpts or from book reviews***

I have given credit where necessary. These articles do not necessarily represent the entire article / book.

1. **In two-three sentences, what is the author’s main point—contribution to public opinion research?**

2. **What is the best quote from your reading? Why?**

**PART II:** Find your group members—others in class who also read and wrote on *same summary*. Do a 1 minute interview: name, major, place on campus to go eat…

5 **Minutes:** Group talk about your answers.

5 **Minutes:** Group discussion about “Why this research is meaningful”

Create an integrated “Best Answer” for 1 and 2.

20 **Minutes:** Group Names announced and each group spokesperson addresses the center of the room and explains:

(1) the main point of the summary and (2) the best quote.

***Instructor will pile on important information between groups in order to create a master lecture about PS scholarship.***

**Group Name:** ___________________________

**Group answer to 1:**

**Group answer to 2:**
I demonstrate that both inequalities in politically relevant resources and the larger political culture surrounding social welfare policy issues disadvantage those groups who are natural supporters of the welfare state. These supporters the economically disadvantaged and those who support principles of political equality are less easily able to form coherent and consistent opinions on such policies than those well endowed with politically relevant resources. Those predisposed to champion the maintenance and expansion of welfare state programs are, as a result, less likely to articulate opinions on surveys.

Thus, public opinion on social welfare policy controversies gives disproportionate weight to respondents opposed to expanding the government's role in the economy. This "exclusion bias"--a phenomenon to this point ignored in the political science literature--is a notable source of bias in public opinion: the "voice" of those who abstain from the social welfare policy questions is different from those who respond to such items. This result mirrors the patterns of inequality found in traditional forms of political participation. Opinion polls may therefore reinforce, not correct, the inegalitarian shortcomings of traditional forms of political participation.

**Data and Model Construction**

I use the 1996 National Election Studies (NES) to examine the nature of exclusion bias in public opinion concerning social welfare policy issues. The NES data is well suited to my purposes because it is designed to represent the entire voting-age American public. Any conclusions regarding the presence of exclusion bias maybe extended to the "mass public" writ broadly. I will examine possible bias in three questions that gauge opinion concerning the proper level of social redistribution of economic resources the Guaranteed Jobs, Services, and Redistribution scales.

The results presented here deepen our understanding of biases in opinion polls in particular, and political participation more generally. As hypothesized, those respondents who are able to form opinions on social welfare policy issues are more conservative than those respondents who are not able to come to such coherent judgments. The natural supporters of the welfare state are, therefore, more likely to abstain from polling questions on the welfare state. Thus, the larger political culture surrounding social welfare policy questions in combination with significant resource differentials that fall along, not across, this political fault line understates support for an expanded social welfare state.

But even if the floor turns out to be the ceiling, the results presented here are problematic. Those who keep silent on social welfare policy issues would, if they gave opinions, speak in a different manner than those who are able to bring their politically relevant wants, needs, and desires to bear on social welfare policy controversies. This bias found here mirrors the patterns of inequality found in traditional forms of political participation, such as voting and contributing time and money to political campaigns (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Opinion polls, contrary to the claims of Gallup and Verba, do not make up for the inegalitarian shortcomings of many forms of participation. Under some circumstances, they echo and may even reinforce those shortcomings.
The public's low level of political knowledge has been documented regularly for many decades, but few of the analyses have moved beyond simple lists of facts and the percentages of Americans who know them. In Carpini and Keeter's *What Americans Know about Politics and Why It Matters*, we now have a comprehensive examination of the public's knowledge about politics based on a number of studies, including a national survey that was designed specifically to investigate political information. Delli Carpini and Keeter not only describe and explain the public's command of the facts, but relate their findings to competing theories of democracy and to the political power of various class, racial, gender, and social groups as well. The result is a major contribution to our understanding of how the American public thinks about politics.

Carpini and Keeter demonstrate that political knowledge plays a critical role in our system. They show that those who know more—older white males with good educations and high incomes—are better able to get what they want from government because they participate more and their behavior serves their self-interests more effectively than those who know less—women, the young, nonwhites, and those with poor educations and low incomes.

In the past, some observers have argued that these disparities in knowledge would be mitigated if political knowledge were multidimensional. That is, if people were issue specialists who did not know much about politics in general, but who knew a great deal about a few issues of relevance to them, then the overall differences in knowledge between groups would matter less. African Americans, for instance, might know a great deal about race-related policies or women might know about gender-related policies.

Delli Carpini and Keeter persuasively show that this is not the case. They do find some evidence for "partially distinct" dimensions (p. 143), but they also find that the dimensions are highly correlated and that describing political knowledge as a single characteristic is not much of an exaggeration. In short, those who suffer disadvantages in one area of knowledge are also likely to suffer disadvantages in all other areas. The authors conclude that this finding "suggests that the pluralist model of democracy, at least as it applies to information about politics, is wrong" (p. 152).

Despite the breadth of Delli Carpini and Keeter's investigation, they have certainly not given us the last word on the subject. Their work raises a number of questions. Perhaps most perplexing to those of us who teach political science: why does college education increase political knowledge almost equally among students of all majors—from political science to biochemistry? If students were given a test of scientific literacy, we would surely expect physics and chemistry majors to score far higher than political science majors, so why do political science majors just slightly outscore students in unrelated disciplines in a test of political knowledge?

Review by: Eric R. A. N. Smith

3: Is Polarization a Myth?
Alan I. Abramowitz Emory University
Kyle L. Saunders Colorado State University

This article uses data from the American National Election Studies and national exit polls to test Fiorina’s assertion that ideological polarization in the American public is a myth. Fiorina argues that twenty-first-century Americans, like the midtwentieth-century Americans described by Converse, “are not very well-informed about politics, do not hold many of their views very strongly, and are not ideological” (2006, 19). However, our evidence indicates that since the 1970s, ideological polarization has increased dramatically among the mass public in the United States as well as among political elites. There are now large differences in outlook between Democrats and Republicans, between red state voters and blue state voters, and between religious voters and secular voters. These divisions are not confined to a small minority of activists—they involve a large segment of the public and the deepest divisions are found among the most interested, informed, and active citizens. Moreover, contrary to Fiorina’s suggestion that polarization turns off voters and depresses turnout, our evidence indicates that polarization energizes the electorate and stimulates political participation.

Fiorina’s Five Claims

1. Moderation. The broadest claim made by Fiorina and the one that underlies all of the others is that the American public is basically moderate—the public is closely divided but not deeply divided. Today as in the past, most Americans are ideological moderates, holding a mixture of liberal and conservative views on different issues. There has been no increase in ideological polarization among the public.

2. Partisan Polarization. While differences between Democratic and Republican identifiers on issues have increased, they are only slightly greater than in the past. Partisan polarization is largely an elite phenomenon—only a thin layer of elected officials and activists are truly polarized in their views.

3. Geographical Polarization. Cultural and political differences between red states and blue states are actually fairly small. The similarities between voters in these two sets of states are much more striking than the differences.

4. Social Cleavages. Divisions within the public based on social characteristics such as age, race, gender, and religious affiliation have been diminishing. While divisions based on religious beliefs and practices have increased, they remain modest and have not supplanted traditional economic divisions as determinants of party identification or voting behavior.

5. Voter Engagement and Participation. Growing polarization of party elites and activists turns off large numbers of voters and depresses turnout in elections.

Conclusions:
The evidence presented in this article does not support Fiorina’s assertion that polarization in America is largely a myth concocted by social scientists and media commentators. Fiorina argues that “we [ordinary Americans] instinctively seek the center while the parties and candidates hang out on the extremes” (2006, xiii). But it is mainly the least interested, least informed and least politically active members of the public who are clustered near the center of the ideological spectrum. The most interested, informed, and active citizens are much more polarized in their political views. Moreover, there are large differences in outlook between Democrats and Republicans, between red state voters and blue state voters, and between religious voters and secular voters. The high level of ideological polarization evident among political elites in the United States reflects real divisions within the American electorate.

Increasing polarization has not caused Americans to become disengaged from the political process. In 2004, according to data from the American National Election Studies, more Americans than ever perceived important differences between the political parties and cared about the outcome of the presidential election. As a result, voter turnout increased dramatically between 2000 and 2004, and record numbers of Americans engaged in campaign activities such as trying to influence their friends and neighbors, displaying bumper stickers and yard signs, and contributing money to the parties and candidates.

The evidence indicates that rather than turning off the public and depressing turnout, polarization energizes the electorate and stimulates political participation.
4: Political Ignorance and Collective Policy Preferences
Martin Gilens

ABSTRACT:
In contrast with the expectations of many analysts, I find that raw policy specific facts, such as the direction of change in the crime rate or the amount of the federal budget devoted to foreign aid, have a significant influence on the public's political judgments. Using both traditional survey methods and survey-based randomized experiments, I show that ignorance of policy-specific information leads many Americans to hold political views different from those they would hold otherwise. I also show that the effect of policy-specific information is not adequately captured by the measures of general political knowledge used in previous research. Finally, I show that the effect of policy-specific ignorance is greatest for Americans with the highest levels of political knowledge. Rather than serve to dilute the influence of new information, general knowledge (and the cognitive capacities it reflects) appears to facilitate the incorporation of new policy-specific information into political judgments.

CONCLUSION:
Previous research demonstrates that "information matters" in shaping the public's political judgments. This article reveals that the kind of information that matters is not only general political knowledge, interest, or cognitive capacity but also the specific facts germane to particular political issues. More specifically, three conclusions can be drawn. First, policy-specific facts can be an important influence on political judgments. Second, this influence is not adequately captured by measures of general political knowledge. Third, the consequences of policy-specific ignorance and the effects of policy-specific information are greatest for Americans with the highest levels of general political knowledge.

It may seem obvious that respondents who know that environmental efforts declined during the Reagan administration are less likely to view George Bush as concerned with the environment, or that informing respondents that foreign aid represents less than one percent of the federal budget diminishes their desire to cut foreign aid spending. But the power of such information to shape the public's political judgments is anything but obvious. First, as tables 4 and 5 showed, such facts have a weak and inconsistent effect on the preferences expressed by less politically knowledgeable Americans. For these citizens, policy-relevant facts seem to carry little weight. Furthermore, previous analysts of policy preferences have not expressed much faith that the kind of policy-specific information discussed here plays an important role in shaping Americans' political views. Zaller's (e.g., 1992) influential studies of change in mass opinion focus strongly on elite leadership as the source of preference formation and change.

Even the foremost proponents of the "rational public" attribute the public's rationality primarily to the use of elite cues rather than raw policy-relevant information. Page and Shapiro (1992) allow that individuals may at times recognize the significance of new policy-relevant facts and adjust their policy preferences accordingly. But "more likely," they write, "responsiveness to new information results from individuals using cognitive shortcuts or rules of thumb, such as reliance upon trusted delegates or reference figures (friends, interest groups, experts, political leaders) to do political reasoning for them and to provide guidance" (p. 17).

The findings presented here do not contradict the belief that elite cues are more important in shaping the public's political judgments than are raw policy-relevant facts. But they do suggest that, at least for the more politically knowledgeable and sophisticated segments of the public, the influence of raw facts can be substantial. Despite the central importance of the public's policy preferences to democratic theory, we remain surprisingly ignorant of the forces that shape them.
Despite a reduction in overt racial prejudice among whites, there has been no decline in the political significance of race. If racial differences in reactions to the O. J. Simpson verdict did not convince us of this verity, Divided by Color should. Kinder and Sanders reveal the vast chasms between white and black opinion across a variety of issues. This is most obvious on policies that explicitly refer to blacks as beneficiaries of government activities, where the average difference between black and white support for six racially explicit policies is over 46 percentage points a gap that would be even larger if respondents and interviewers had been matched on race. "Differences as drastic as these," the authors point out, "simply have no counterpart in studies of public opinion" (27). Large divisions are also evident on issues that are implicitly racial (food stamps, welfare spending, capital punishment), and on policies of domestic social spending. The authors explain the racial divide by analyzing the "primary ingredients" of public opinion: self-interest, sympathy and resentment toward racial groups, and support for the principles of equality, individualism, and limited government.

Despite its prominence in democratic theory, individual self-interest has little influence on support for explicitly racial policies. Group interests, assessed through items that tap respondents’ perceptions of how their racial group will be harmed or advantaged by affirmative action policies, have a greater impact on opinion. The core argument in this work is that racial resentment (the new term for what Kinder and his colleagues had formerly called symbolic racism) is integral to white political opinion. It taps an animosity toward blacks based not on the belief of biological inferiority (with which it is weakly correlated) but on the belief- that blacks have not tried hard enough to achieve economic and social success. Racial resentment has a strong effect on an array of racially salient policies, and modest effects across a wide range of nonracial policies, including family leave, morality issues, immigration, and even some aspects of foreign policy. Moreover, racial resentment better explains white perceptions of their self and group-interests than do their actual circumstances.

Affect toward blacks is not the only important ingredient of racial opinion; belief in the principles of limited government and equality of opportunity also matter. The principle of economic individualism, however, has virtually no impact on any policy area-an intriguing finding given that racial resentment is theoretically tied to a belief in abstract individualism. The authors examine how the terms of a policy debate affect public opinion. For instance, respondents were randomly offered one of two possible justifications for opposing affirmative action: that such policies discriminate against whites or that such policies give blacks advantages they have not earned. Under the unearned advantage frame, racial resentment has a substantial negative impact on opinions of affirmative action, while endorsement of equal opportunity is associated with support for affirmative action. Under the reverse discrimination frame, racial resentment has no effect while endorsement of equal opportunity is associated with opposition to affirmative action.

These findings are consistent with the contention that elite opponents of affirmative action adopted the reverse discrimination frame in order to have an argument that could both appeal to a belief in equal opportunity and withstand the charge of racism. The 1988 presidential campaign illustrates the impact of elite frames. Republican ads featuring Willie Horton and the Massachusetts prison furlough program seem to be a clear case of elites framing the vote choice in terms of racial sentiments. In fact, for those respondents interviewed on the eve of the election, the impact of racial resentment on support for Bush was more than twice what it was for those interviewed prior to the onset of the Horton campaign.

The tone of the book is one of pessimism. Racial resentment is an important ingredient in understanding white political opinion. Realizing this, elites manipulate the terms of political discourse so that race prejudice redounds to their benefit. Kinder and Sanders base their findings on a variety of National Election Studies as well as the General Social Survey. Their analysis is careful paying great attention to replication and the effects of alternative wording and rooted in theories of democratic governance. In the process they have produced a work that students of public opinion and electoral politics will find extremely valuable.

According to some influential critics of the American political system, public policy preferences shift often, quickly, and in a fairly arbitrary fashion. Consequently, they should not form the basis for relevant government decisions. In contrast, Page and Shapiro contend that in most instances collective opinion is relatively stable and slow to change, and shifts that do occur are manifested in an understandable manner reflective of the prevailing conditions and information shared in the populace. They argue that Americans have reason to be more optimistic about the success of majoritarian democracy than democratic theory revisionists claim.

Page and Shapiro suggest that if American democracy is not seen to work well, the public does not deserve to bear the brunt of the blame; problems can be more aptly traced to defects in the political information delivery system and to elites and officials unresponsive to the wishes of the people. The empirical underpinnings of the conclusions of Page and Shapiro are based on an enormous mass of data derived "from all published or otherwise available surveys of the American public's policy preferences" (p. 42) that could be located for the years from 1935 to 1990. The total pool contained over 10,000 survey policy preference questions touching upon diverse social, economic, and foreign policy areas ranging from civil rights, crime, and abortion to taxes, inflation, and economic regulation to isolationism, military alliances, and foreign aid. Different subsets of data were extracted and subjected "to fairly simple quantitative data analyses" (p. xii) to answer various important questions posed by the researchers.

For example, to determine the degree of stability and change in collective policy preferences, data from 1,128 questions repeated with identical wording on one or more occasions were gleaned from the records of five major survey organizations. Some questions were asked on several occasions and hence the data really incorporate responses to over 4,000 separate question administrations. All changes of six percentage points or more in public opinion were categorized as statistically significant. By this criterion, there were 556 significant changes on 473 of the 1,128 questions. In other words, 58% of the 1,128 questions showed no significant change whatsoever. Although only 13% of the significant changes were of a magnitude of 20 percentage points or more, 41% were classified as "abrupt" because they occurred at a rate of at least 10 percentage points per year. Fluctuations, more or less arbitrarily defined as "consisting of two or more significant opinion changes in opposite directions within two years, or three or more changes back and forth within four years" (p. 58), were found for 18% of a subset of 173 questions asked frequently enough to detect such swings.

From these and similar analyses, Page and Shapiro conclude that American collective opinion about policy has not behaved in a capricious and volatile manner. Rather, "collective policy preferences have been quite stable" (p. 65), "when opinion change does occur, it is usually modest in magnitude" (p. 65), and "fluctuations of opinion, movements back and forth in different directions, are very unusual" (p. 65).

The core of the book centers on "the rational public" and how it is "rational" in a very specific sense: While we grant the rational ignorance of most individuals, and the possibility that their policy preferences are shallow and unstable, we maintain that public opinion as a collective phenomenon is nonetheless stable (though not immovable), meaningful, and indeed rational in a higher, if somewhat looser, sense: it is able to make distinctions; it is organized in coherent patterns; it is reasonable, based on the best available information; and it is adaptive to new information or changed circumstances, responding in similar ways to similar stimuli. Moreover, while we grant that recorded responses of individuals to survey questions vary from one interview to another, we maintain that surveys accurately measure this stable, meaningful, and reasonable collective public opinion. (p. 14) Can a rational public be populated mostly by irrational persons? Yes, according to Page and Shapiro. Social interaction and the statistical aggregation process make this possible: Even if individual opinions or survey responses are ill-informed, shallow, and fluctuating, collective opinion can be real, highly stable, and . . . based on all the available information. .. If the available information is accurate and helpful . . . collective opinion can even be wise. (p. 17)
Stimson's book provides a fascinating complement to another recent work on American public opinion, Benjamin I. Page and Robert Y. Shapiro's The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in Americans' Policy Preferences (University of Chicago Press, 1992). Like Stimson, Page and Shapiro start with a massive historical collection of marginal distributions for policy questions from American opinion surveys. But the uses to which these data are put are remarkably different. Page and Shapiro describe the individual policy time series in exhaustive detail in a volume running upwards of 450 pages; Stimson synthesizes them into a meaningful pattern in about one third the space.

The crux of Stimson's synthesis is the notion of "policy mood" (p. 17) which subsumes the ups and downs in dozens of individual survey items into broad liberal and conservative swings. These policy moods, Stimson finds, are only subtly related to changes in aggregate partisanship, and lead rather than follow swings in ideological identification. As a result, policy moods do not always correspond to popular depictions of ideological climate, especially in the current period of "unnoticed liberalism" (p. 119).

Stimson argues persuasively that policy moods do respond to actual policy outputs. LBJ gave us the Great Society, and the public turned rapidly and decisively away from demanding more liberal domestic policies as a result. Reagan gave us a conservative retrenchment, and the conservative policy mood that had accumulated throughout the 1970s dissipated equally rapidly and equally decisively. Now we are in another markedly liberal period—a product, Stimson believes, of the "Reagan fiscal collar" of tax cuts and high deficits (p. 122-124). What will happen next?

Characteristically, Stimson offers a menu of possibilities (ranging from public resignation to government inaction, to full restoration of the federal revenue base) and a useful caution: "We can extrapolate from time series with hazard. Sometimes we merely push the road forward from what is well known to what is likely. Sometimes that road runs off the side of a cliff" (p. 117).

Pedagogically, Stimson's analysis is exemplary. He begins with pictures of raw marginals for individual policy questions, then proceeds patiently to standardized marginals, to summaries based upon regression analysis, and finally to a summary index based upon his own innovative recursive scaling procedure. When there are discrepancies, he does not hesitate to go back to the unprocessed data to set aside specific issues (most notably, abortion) that don't fit his general pattern, or to overrule statistical anomalies on the basis of political common sense.

As in any good graduate seminar, there are plenty of insightful digressions. These address everything from common misconceptions about sampling error and the inferential consequences of the sudden abandonment of the Likert response format in the early 1960s to the limitations of the reelection motive for explaining legislative behavior, the impact of Joe McCarthy on apparent trends in tolerance, and the psychology of tax bracket creep. Stimson modestly describes his book as an "unfinished essay," a temporary stopping point on the way to a more ambitious study of "governments responding to shifting public mood" (p. xxi). Certainly there is more to be done - in connecting policy moods with the perceptions and calculations of working politicians, in fleshing out the implications of the "zones of acquiescence" evident in public responses to policy change, and in establishing the magnitude and regularity of the impact of policy moods on policy outcomes. In the meantime, this interim report is not to be missed.

Review by: Larry M. Bartels

Political Science Quarterly, Vol. 107, No. 2 (Summer, 1992), pp. 364-365

In The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion, John Zaller takes these basic ideas and elaborates them considerably to construct and test a general theory of how information diffuses through the public, how individuals accept or reject this information in light of their political predispositions, and how they convert their reactions into attitude reports on mass surveys. Zaller's ambition is thus to combine theory and research in the field of mass communications with a model of the survey response based on recent work by cognitive and political psychologists. Contrary to mainstream research on political attitudes (but consistent with recent work in cognitive psychology), Zaller explicitly rejects the presumption that survey responses are manifestations of underlying fixed attitudes, possibly corrupted by measurement error. He proposes instead that reports of attitudes are constructed anew by the respondent on each occasion out of "considerations" that happen to be mentally accessible at that moment. What those accessible considerations happen to be may be influenced by a host of factors, including question wording, the survey setting, recent news stories, and so on.

Public Opinion Quarterly Opinion statements, according to this model, are the outcome of a process in which people receive new information, decide whether to accept it, and then sample from their store of considerations at the moment of answering questions: the RAS model of the survey response. By laying out the logic of his model carefully and evaluating it with a series of ingenious analyses of a broad array of data, Zaller has made a signal contribution to the study of public opinion. Zaller uses his RAS model first to derive and test hypotheses about relationships between responses to open-ended and closed-ended items in recent American National Election Study (ANES) surveys concerning a variety of political issues. He then applies the model to account for survey response effects of interviewer's race, question wording and ordering, response options, and so on.

Up to this point the book has dealt only with attitude change in response to a stream of messages presumably supporting a single point of view on an issue. Zaller extends the analysis to take into account two-sided message flows. The action can be hard to follow unless the reader pays close attention because, as the author puts it, "dominant and countervalent messages can have different effects in different segments of the population, depending on citizens' political awareness and ideological orientations and on the relative intensities of the two messages" (p. 185). After presenting some results of a content analysis of major news magazine stories, Zaller estimates an 18-parameter, multi-equation, multinomial logit model of Vietnam War attitude statements, capitalizing on data from four ANES surveys. The estimated model generates patterns of opinion for subsamples (classified by level of political awareness, issue predisposition, and year of survey) that are plausible and apparently fit the observed data well. The question is whether a far simpler model would have performed virtually as satisfactorily.

Zaller then turns his attention to the dynamics of voter choice in response to campaign information flows. This is a particularly effective way to evaluate the RAS model. First, data on electoral choice are quite rich, enabling more direct tests than in previous chapters of hypotheses about how respondents construct attitude statements out of their preexisting "considerations." Second, U.S. House elections, in particular, provide a hefty sample of situations in which the intensity of dominant and countervalent messages (transmitted by incumbent and challenger campaigns, respectively) varies from district to district. Moreover, those intensities can be proxied reasonably directly by such variables as incumbent's and challenger's campaign spending. Taken together, Zaller's electoral studies demonstrate clearly the important effects of both intra individual factors and election-level information flows on voter choice.

Zaller's working assumption is that and how the public thinks about politics is determined by elites-government leaders, journalists, policy experts, and the like-rather than vice versa. This is plausible in many situations; indeed, it is accepted as an article of faith in most public opinion research. ("The voice of the people is but an echo," wrote V. O. Key.) It is almost certainly false as a blanket assertion, however. A related criticism concerns the model's "implicit assumption that individuals never think for themselves, but instead rely exclusively on the reception of communications reaching them from the external environment," as Zaller puts it (p. 287). That is, there is no place in the model's specification for individuals to perceive elite-supplied information differently or to process and revise what they receive. Nor does the model capture the possibility that citizens acquire politically relevant information directly from their own common experiences. Zaller justifiably responds that even if the RAS model is imperfect in some respects, it nevertheless accounts for many nuances of individual-level survey responses and aggregate opinion dynamics.

The RAS model appears to capture the dynamics of mass opinion quite well. "Public opinion," in contrast, means-or should mean, or could mean-opinions that are held by "the public." By that definition, public opinions arise when citizens deliberate and reflect on issues of common concern so as to arrive at public, as opposed to wholly private, judgments and preferences. John Zaller's The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion is a masterpiece. It contributes substantially to our knowledge about how individuals receive and accept information transmitted by political elites and how that process in turn affects the responses individuals provide to mass surveys. Perhaps his next book will be equally valuable in informing us about whether public opinion can be something more than that.

**ABSTRACT:**
Scholars have documented the deficiencies in political knowledge among American citizens. Another problem, misinformation, has received less attention. People are misinformed when they confidently hold wrong beliefs. We present evidence of misinformation about welfare and show that this misinformation acts as an obstacle to educating the public with correct facts. Moreover, widespread misinformation can lead to collective preferences that are far different from those that would exist if people were correctly informed. The misinformation phenomenon has implications for two currently influential scholarly literatures: the study of political heuristics and the study of elite persuasion and issue framing.

**Conclusion:**
Judging from our findings on factual beliefs about welfare, many people are likely to be misinformed, not only inaccurate in their factual beliefs but confident that they are right. Their errors can be skewed in a particular direction for example, pro- or anti-welfare-and may cause or at least reinforce preferences about policy. To a degree that we cannot specify with much precision, people also resist correct information. We do not pretend to know how widespread misinformation is, how much it skews policy preferences or behavior, or whether any feasible changes in media practices or political debate could significantly reduce it.

The principal implication is that students of public opinion should take seriously the distinction between misinformation-confidently held false beliefs and a mere lack of information. It is one thing not to know and be aware of one's ignorance. It is quite another to be dead certain about factual beliefs that are far off the mark. This distinction has especially serious implications for two currently influential streams of thought that assume citizens to be uninformed. One is the work on political heuristics, the other the work on political persuasion and issue framing.

We currently do not know how mistaken people are in their factual beliefs or how often they follow them when judging policy. We can say this: first, the utility of heuristics should decline if not become negative as the severity of the misinformation problem increases, and second, the possibility of a misinformed citizenry renders the celebration of political heuristics premature. The second literature argues that political elites politicians, interest groups, members of the media exert considerable influence on how and what people think about public policy. The most extensive work is Zaller (1992; also see Alvarez and Brehm 1998), who argues that the configuration of elite messages determines what ideas or considerations people take into account and thus what judgments they reach. Related research on framing effects has accumulated evidence that people respond differently to alternative frames of the same issue (Krosnick and Kinder 1990; Nelson, Clawson, and Oxley 1997; Nelson and Kinder 1996). For example, people assess affirmative action more positively when it is presented as reverse discrimination against whites (Kinder and Sanders 1990).

Not all citizens respond to all frames, not all citizens are misinformed, and not all misinformed citizens necessarily refuse to move under all circumstances. In fact, available evidence says no more than that there are (in the case of framing) or are not (in the case of factual education) statistically significant changes in the dependent variable. A statistically significant change in preferences could result from many people changing a lot, a few people changing a lot, or many changing just a little. Our reading of the evidence is that the third condition people changing just a little explains many of the positive findings on framing effects. Small changes in expressed preferences few studies ascertain whether those changes are permanent differ little from no change. Second, when citizens are able to hear opposing sides of a political argument, rather than falling into confusion or succumbing to uncertainty, or inner conflict, or muddle-headedness, they are more likely "to go home," that is, to pick out the side of the issue that fits their general view of the matter.

Finally, frames such as racial discrimination versus reverse discrimination and free speech versus public order are references to particular goals, values, or problems. In other words, they center on aspects of an issue to which people can readily relate. It is not surprising, therefore, that the framing of an issue, especially in the context of a survey where people are given value cues directly, moves people more than the presentation of facts does. But let us assume that this is precisely how many people act in the real world: they respond to rhetorical issue frames but not to facts. This only exacerbates the misinformation problem, for it indicates that when people do not use their mistaken beliefs it is not because they correct them with facts, but rather be.